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KASHUBIA

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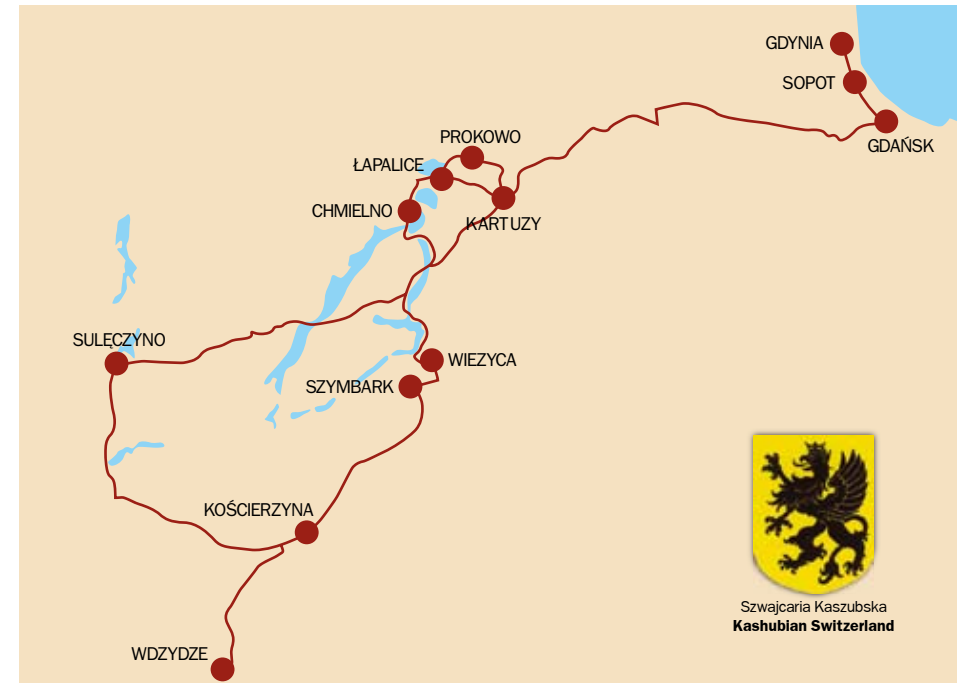


Introducing Kashubia

Bursting with magnificent lakes, hills, streams and forests concealing a small, buttermilk-drinking race of people who speak a strange language and who observe their own unique customs, the little-known region west of Gdańsk that is Kashubia has been drawing urban Poles into its lazy summer clutches for generations. 'Not German enough for the Germans, not Polish enough for the Poles' was how Günter Grass, a Kashubian himself, described his native kinfolk, whose heartland, *Szwajcaria Kaszubska*, or Kashubian Switzerland, offers a wealth of opportunities for the traveller tired of the same old Polish holiday routine. Refreshingly different and pleasantly lacking in foreigners, Kashubian Switzerland is small enough to be covered in a day or two by car or bus, yet rich enough in opportunities to swim, fish and sail as well as enjoy its unique culture to fill you with enough good memories to last for years to come. This free pdf guide offers a brief glimpse inside the best and most representative things to see and do in the region, starting with its quirky capital, Kartuzy, and ending just 60km south in the tiny, unpronounceable lakeside village of Wdzydze Kiszewskie.

Accommodation
Sightseeing
Sustenance
Transport

and a whole host of other useful information



Essentials

Maps

To fully explore Kashubia it's essential that you have at least one good map. Recommended are Carta Blanca's excellent 1:50,000 scale KASZEBE, which includes a useful illustrated list of things to see and do. The map is also marked with place names in both Polish and Kashubian, and features detailed street plans of Kartuzy and Kościerzyna. The other excellent map is Skrzynia Czasu's KASZUBY, which also includes illustrations of things to see and do, but covers a larger area than the other map (although not in as much detail), including the coast, and has a handy key to Kashubia's top 72 sights.

Money

That little piece of plastic you've been using to buy everything with in the tri-city is fairly useless in Kashubia, plus ATMs are also only found in the larger towns. Taking plenty of cash is not only recommended but crucial if you don't want to embarrass yourself at the end of a good meal.

Getting around

All of the places listed here can be reached by bus, but unless you really do enjoy a challenge you should think twice before attempting to explore Kashubia using public transport. A car offers you the freedom to move about as and when you like.

Usługi Transportowe Os. Sikorskiego 6/32 (Kartuzy), tel./fax 058 681 49 76. Good value minibus self-drive options.

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ESSENTIAL CITY GUIDES

Instant Kashubia

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Kartuzy

A pleasant 30km drive west from Gdańsk, Kartuzy is a sleepy little town of 16,000 people built around three lakes. First mentioned in 1391, Kartuzy takes its name from the Carthusian monks who were invited to set up a monastery here in the 14th century. Currently reinventing itself as the region's tourism hub, Kartuzy's good-looking Rynek, peaceful parks and lakeside walks offer a brief diversion before delving into your first Kashubian adventure.

Eat

A somewhat sweet and fatty affair, the Kashubian dining experience differs little from the standard Polish one. Herring is a particular Kashubian favourite, as is the local *bulwy z maślanek*, a simple glass of buttermilk with a side dish of boiled potatoes. Portions of just about anything tend to be huge, delicious, and extremely good value for money.

Kaszubska ul. Parkowa 4, tel. 058 681 21 15. Situated next to a small, peaceful park, Kaszubska offers the classic Polish canteen-style dining experience with the added bonus of a few outside tables. The non-English menu features several Kashubian dishes including traditional potato pancakes, and the recommended *połędwica po kartusku z cebulą ziemniaki zestaw*, a wonderfully greasy beefsteak topped with caramelised onions and served with boiled potatoes and a mixed salad. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00, Sun 11:00 - 22:00.

Sleep

Korman ul. 3 Maja 36, tel./fax 058 685 34 00, korman@msd.com.pl, www.korman.msd.com.pl. A short walk from the train and bus stations, Korman offers clean, modern, no-frills rooms overlooking a forest. The rooms come with showers only, with other facilities including a sauna, an in-house restaurant complete with live music, and a wonderful indoor swimming pool. ▶ Singles 85 - 115zł, doubles 140 - 190zł, triples 185 - 190zł.

See

Muzeum Kaszubskie ul. Kościelna 1, tel. 058 681 14 42. A beautiful evocation of Kashubian culture on two floors, including some suburb examples of traditional folk art

Tourist information

Although information in English in Kashubia is almost non-existent, a visit to any of the places below will help inspire you to look deeper into the region than the limited space here allows. Kashubia is rather infectious, and you may find yourself extending your day trip into something a little longer.

Tourist information Rynek 2, tel. 058 684 02 01. This privately run operation sells good local maps as well as traditional folk art and CDs of traditional Kashubian folk music. ▶ Open 09:00 - 16:00, Sat 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sun, Mon.

Tourist information ul. Gdańska 15, tel. 058 681 01 85. The official tourist office. There's not much, but the staff do speak English. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Wed 12:00 - 15:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Kościelna Rynek 21, tel. 058 686 28 80. Full of good things to read in Polish and German, also find a small selection of maps and the usual array of local folk art. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

The Kashubians

The Kashubians are a true ethnic minority, distinct from the Poles in both language and culture. Originally western Slavs with ethnic links to the Poles, the Kashubians are believed to have settled in the area around 1,500 years ago, although the first records date from the 13th century when the Pomeranian Dukes included 'Duke of Kashubia' among their illustrious titles. Estimates as to just how many Kashubians and people of Kashubian descent live in Poland today vary wildly. In Poland's 2002 census just 5,100 people declared Kashubian nationality, whilst 51,000 declared Kashubian as their native language.

Kashubian is a West Slavic language belonging to the Lechitic group of languages of northern Poland, and is thought to be a variation of the original Pomerian language. Kashubian enjoys legal protection in Poland as a minority language, is taught in Polish schools, and can be found on many street signs in the region. The first notable Kashubian activist was Florian Ceynowa (1817-1881), who devised the Kashubian alphabet, formalised Kashubian grammar and published a collection of historical stories of life among the Kashubians. Other Kashubian activists include the author Hieronim Derdowski (1852-1902) and the physician and writer Aleksander Majkowski (1876-1938), the leader of the Young Kashubian movement.

One of the things you'll notice all over Kashubia is the proliferation of folk art, both religious and secular. Of the many folk art disciplines, the Kashubians pride themselves on their embroidery. Kashubian embroidery uses just five colours: green, red, yellow, black and blue, of which the latter comes in three distinct shades. Green represents the forests, red the fire and blood shed in defence of the homeland, yellow the sun, black the earth and the three shades of blue representing the sky, the lakes and the sea. Ceramics has a centuries-old tradition in Kashubia, and again the designs are simple. Kashubian ceramics are decorated with a number of traditional designs including the Kashubian star, fish scales and local flowers, all embellished with wavy lines and dots. The Kashubians are also great weavers, even managing to weave buckets and jugs from pine roots and straw capable of holding water. Their weaving skills can also be seen on the roofs of the many thatched houses in the region. The Kashubians are also well known for a style of primitive painting on glass, woodcuts, and wooden sculptures including roadside chapels known as the Passions of Christ. Wood is also carved into elaborate walking sticks, animal heads and musical instruments, including the extraordinary *burczybas*, similar to a double bass but in the shape of a barrel with a horse hair tail. A bizarre instrument indeed, a *burczybas* is played by a total of three musicians. The Kashubians are great snuff takers, making it themselves and giving it to visitors as a sign of joy, good luck and an invitation to meet again. Traditional Kashubian snuffboxes are made from cattle horns that are boiled, flattened, and cut into unique shapes.

The Kashubians believe strongly that all of these things mark them out as an individual race. Many Kashubians even believe themselves to be the last surviving tribe of the ancient Balts.



(see *The Kashubians*) as well as local costumes, farming and fishing implements, looms, wickerwork and a small shop selling a range of traditional handicrafts. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00, Mon 08:30 - 12:30, Sat 08:00 - 15:00. Closed Sun. Admission 7.50/5.50zł.

Carthusian Church Monastery ul. Klasztorna 5. Built in 1380, this amazing Gothic church originally featured a simple shingle roof, which was changed into its now notorious coffin-shaped lead sheet iron form in the 1730s. The church and surrounding ensemble of buildings were once home to a small group of Carthusian monks from Bohemia, a peculiar brotherhood who favoured among other eccentricities a Trappist lifestyle and sleeping in coffins. Inside, find a rich collection of Baroque altars, 29 elaborately carved wooden seats for the monks, a large collection of 17th-century religious paintings and the famous clock pendulum on which hangs a white angel swinging a scythe, accompanied by the eerie words 'each passing seconds brings you closer to your death'. The church is considered by many to be one of the most interesting religious buildings in Europe and is an absolute must see.

Chmielno

Heading west 10km, the next stop is the so-called Pearl of Pomerania, Chmielno, a small lakeside town of 4,000 people. Dating from the 13th century, Chmielno has seen more than its fair share of devastation over the centuries. Now a centre for Kashubian ceramics as well as a popular water-based holiday destination, a visit here can easily be extended over a day or more.

Eat

U Czôrlńściego ul. Gryfa Pomorskiego 63, tel. 058 684 22 78. A large restaurant with alas no English menu, serving good Polish and Kashubian meat and fish dishes in pleasant surroundings. There's also a good terrace with

a view of one Chmienio's three lakes, a shashlik pit and a small playground for children tucked away in the back garden. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00.

Sleep

Zajazd u Czôrlńściego ul. Gryfa Pomorskiego 63, tel. 058 684 22 78. Simple rooms and apartments, some renovated and some not, with big double beds, satellite television, bathrooms with showers only and a few with balconies overlooking the lake. A popular destination for wedding parties, booking in advance is highly recommended. ▶ Doubles 80 - 100zł, triples 120 - 140zł, suite 150 - 160zł.

See

Museum of Kashubian Ceramics ul. F. Necla 1. The Necel family have been making things from Kashubian clay for generations. Originally from Kościerzyna, Franciszek Necel (1869-1935) moved to Chmielno in 1897 and opened a small pottery, combining original Kashubian ceramic design with his own manufacturing techniques. The current workshop, run by Franciszek's grandson's nephew, Karol Elasz Necel, also features the small Museum of Kashubian Ceramics and a shop. The museum was opened in 1993, and contains a collection of local ceramics as well as a short history of the pottery. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun. Admission 3zł. Free guided tours for groups of over 20. No guides for individual visitors.

SS. Peter & Paul's Church ul. Gryfa Pomorskiego 41.

This rather austere and unremarkable 19th century red brick church is worth a quick look inside if you're not familiar with rural Polish churches. The rather modest décor includes two rows of pine pews with simple, hand-painted floral patterns and a rather nice wooden ceiling decorated with traditional Kashubian folk art motifs.





See

Kashubian Folk University (Kaszubski Uniwersytet Ludowy) Wieżycza 1, tel. 058 684 38 14, www.kfhs.com.pl. The idea for Folk Universities (also known as Folk High Schools) was first propagated in the 19th century by a forward-looking Dane called MFS Grundtvig (1783-1872). Based on the principles of shared education, cultural awareness and local democracy, Folk Universities remain a rarity in the world, with just a handful existing in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Poland. The Kashubian Folk University is engaged in a number of projects including the provision of information on EU legislation and its effects on the local farming community to running practical Kashubian folk art courses. The building itself is notable for its superb folk art exhibition, including some fine carved and painted wooden sculptures and one or two outstanding, naive-style paintings. ▶ Open 11:00 - 19:00, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 18:00. Admission free.

Kościerzyna

Before heading off to Kościerzyna, consider a short detour to the nearby village of Szymbark. Home of the *Centrum Edukacja i Promocji Regionu w Szymbarku*, a fascinating retreat dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Kashubian culture, among the miscellaneous reorientations of folk art and culture on display find the world's longest plank of wood. Officially recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records*, at 36.83m the plank is about as exciting as it sounds when seen in real life. Nearby is *Szczyt Wieżycza*, a 35m iron and concrete tower with magnificent views stretching as far as the Hel Peninsula some 75km to the northeast. The town of Kościerzyna itself is a straightforward 15km drive from Wieżycza. First mentioned as Costerina in 1282, Kościerzyna is as close as it gets in Kashubia to being an industrial city. A large porcelain factory in nearby Łubiana, which creates a lot of employment for



Wieżycza

Heading south through narrow winding lanes, the abundance of fairytale thatched-roof cottages, large, ungainly storks, horses ploughing the fields and rosy-faced locals selling plump strawberries from the side of the road means you've really hit the heart of Kashubia. Half way to Wieżycza stop if you can at Złota Góra, easily recognisable by the large car park on the right as you climb a steepish hill. Here you'll find a large concrete, communist-era monument dedicated to the secret military organisation *Gryf Pomorski*, founded in nearby Czarlino on Christmas Eve, 1939. Called 'For Those Who Died for a Polish Pomerania', the typically macho memorial remembers those Kashubians who gave their lives fighting the Germans in WWII. At 329m above sea level, Wieżycza, another 10km or so along the road, is the highest point in Kashubia. Keep heading south through the town as far as the road goes and turn right at the T-junction towards Kościerzyna. A couple of hundred metres on the right you'll find the Kashubian Folk University (*Kaszubski Uniwersytet Ludowy*), a recommended place to stop, eat, see some great local art, and possibly spend the night.

Eat

Gościńiec Wieżycza Wieżycza 1, tel. 058 684 38 14. Part of the Kashubian Folk University and decorated with some great examples of Kashubian folk art, and featuring one of the few English menus in the region. The excellent dishes on offer include rabbit, Kashubian herring, goose and trout. ▶ Open 10:00 - 20:00. (14-18zł).

Sleep

Gościńiec Wieżycza Wieżycza 1, tel. 058 684 38 14, fax 058 684 38 01, wiezyca@kfhs.com.pl. Basic, ancient, and spotlessly clean, the hostel-like rooms above the Kashubian Folk University all come with a simple bed, wobbly table, hand basin and little else. Toilets and showers are communal, but at these prices you'd be a fool to expect anything more. ▶ Doubles 120zł, triples 150zł.

the town, gives Kościerzyna an almost working class feel. Its Rynek looks a bit tatty these days but it's a nice enough place to stop for a quick drink, and there are a number of things to see and do to take up an hour or two of your time. Worth seeing is the stylised monument to the Young Kashubian activist Aleksander Majkowski (1876-1938), which can be found in a small park just northeast of the Rynek.

Eat

Ratuszowa Rynek 9, tel. 058 686 83 10. This classic Polish small town restaurant comes with the added bonuses of a large summer terrace and an atrium at the back if it's raining. The English-language menu includes Gypsy cutlets and trout in white wine, as well as a few basic Polish staples such as pierogi. ▶ Open 11:00 - 22:00.

Sleep

Lesny Dwór ul. Zeromskiego 15 (Sulecchino), tel. 058 684 40 60, www.lesnydwor.pl. Just north of Kościerzyna, a fabulous manor house in idyllic gardens offering a choice of quality singles, doubles and suites with satellite television and all the trimmings. On the edge of Lake Węgorzyno other facilities include fine dining, conference facilities and a range of group offers. ▶ Singles 100 - 105zł, doubles 124 - 140zł, triples 144 - 170zł, suites 120 - 260zł.

See

Locomotive Museum ul. Towarowa 7, tel. 058 686 35 00. Kościerzyna's connection with the railways dates back to 1885, and this rather disappointing museum sets out to record its history from then until the present day. To the uninitiated it appears to be little more than a large collection of rusty trains curated by enthusiasts who also provide educational programmes to Polish school children. To you it may be something altogether more exciting, but be warned, you won't find any information in English here. Find it to the east of the town, on the left as you drive in. Follow the Parowozownia Kościerzyna signs. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Admission 3/2zł.

Museum Kościerzyny Rynek 9, tel. 058 686 28 80. Located inside the best looking building on the Rynek this is your classic small town museum, with a few exhibits (in Polish only) including regional artefacts dating from prehistory to modern times, including a fascinating part of a local sewer from the Middle Ages. ▶ Open 10:00 - 16:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun, Mon. Admission 3/1.50zł.

Wdzydze Kiszewskie

The last leg of this short Kashubian odyssey follows a leisurely 10km drive south to the fabulous village of Wdzydze Kiszewskie. First mentioned in 1258, the village's growth was somewhat slow to say the least. At the end of the 17th century there were just 12 inhabitants. Today the village remains tiny, but thanks to its glorious lakeside setting and its highly recommended museum, the village fills with people during the summer months, who come to unwind and simply mess about on the water. The village runs for about a kilometre along the bank of the lake, with campsites, cafés and boat hire scattered around from the museum at one end to the Niedźwiadek hotel at the other.

Eat

Niedźwiadek Wdzydze Kiszewskie 32, tel. 058 686 13 13. A large and opulent restaurant with several outdoor terraces serving good Kashubian, Polish and international dishes in the village's top (and only proper) hotel. Although it's more fun to eat sizzling barbecue food at one of the small lakeside cafés, this place does at least offer the option of English-speaking waiters and a decent toilet. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00.

Sleep

Niedźwiadek Wdzydze Kiszewskie 32, tel. 058 686 13 13, fax 058 686 13 33, niedzwiadek@niedzwiadek.gda.pl, www.niedzwiadek.gda.pl. A range of clean rooms from comfort to standard class, with all the extras you'd expect, to gorgeous wooden cabins to basic caravans. Set at the opposite end of the village from the Ethnographic Museum and overlooking a small marina, this is as good as it gets in Wdzydze Kiszewskie. ▶ Singles 140 - 290zł, doubles 160 - 340zł, suites 210 - 340zł.

See

Outdoor Ethnographic Museum Tel. 058 686 11 30, www.muzeum-wdzydze.gda.pl. Started in 1906 by local husband and wife Teodora and Izidor Gulgowscy, Poland's oldest open air museum features an extraordinary collection of 40 or so buildings dating from the 18th to the early 20th century. Set over 22 hectares of lush green land on the edge of a large lake, find a superb assortment of farms, manor houses, windmills, churches and other traditional buildings from Kashubia and nearby Kociewia, many of them furnished and staffed by English-speaking guides who can tell you a little of their history. Very much a hands-on experience, many of the buildings still function as they used to, such as the steam-driven sawmill and the lovely wooden church, built in 1700 and still performing Mass and the occasional wedding. With plenty of information in English and so much to do, you need to give this place at least three hours of your time. The museum also has a small restaurant serving traditional food cooked over an open fire. ▶ Open 10:00 - 15:00. Closed Mon. Admission 9.60/7zł.

